

Animas River Mine Spill Coordination Meeting

August 31, 2015

10:30 am - 1:00 pm

Durango Public Library

Senator Ellen Roberts- Welcome comments

- We come together because we all care about the Animas River and our communities
- Encouraged attendees to place emphasis on finding solutions rather than placing blame. There is a need to look for long term solutions.
- She asked RWEACT to share their experience since it could be a model for us to consider in the Animas Watershed.

Marsha Porter-Norton facilitated the meeting.

Rio Grande Watershed Emergency Action Coordination Team (RWEACT)

- Tom Spezze, Executive Director
- Travis Smith, San Luis Valley Irrigation District/CWCB Board of Directors
- Cindy Dozier, Hinsdale County Commissioner
- Steve Belz- Black Creek Hydrology and Hydrology Team Leader
- Jerry Dennis- Rio Grande Emergency Manager and Emergency MGMT Team Leader

Overview/comments/thoughts from RWEACT-

RWEACT formed in response to West Fork Fire in 2013 that burned 88,000 acres in the Rio Grande National Forest. The fire had major impacts on the affected communities. People in the community wanted to do something but were frustrated by federal rules that limited what some agencies could do.

RWEACT brought together responsible Federal, State, and local agencies that all had some type of authority or responsibility related to the fire or its after effects. Members of the public were also able to participate. Initial public meetings focused on blame but quickly changed to moving forward in a positive manner.

The group came together for the benefit of the watershed as a whole.

The benefits of RWEACT were:

- Improved communication between USFS, local government and the public
- Better understanding of what each organization could and could not do
- Improved coordination to address pressing issues
- Ability to secure funding from Governor' Office for public safety and restoration issues identified by RWEACT.

RWEACT is now considering moving beyond traditional water or forest issues. They are also becoming a 501(c)3 organization

QUESTION:

Should we pursue this concept for an Animas Watershed group in response to the Gold King Mine spill? Thoughts and questions from breakout groups included:

A goal could be to increase community resiliency

Increase collaboration within the area because currently groups are not coordinated in their efforts

Can current efforts be enhanced?

Different groups are collecting good data on the Animas River. This group could facilitate exchange of information

Facilitate better communication between various groups

Each entity brings something to the table.

Should it be organized by user groups? How do we pull the groups together?

Should scope be broadened beyond mine reclamation issues to forest health or other potential issues that could affect our communities?

Would this just become just another layer of bureaucracy? Everyone has enough meetings already.

GKM spill highlights the connectivity of communities- Silverton, Durango, Southern Ute Tribe as well as other downstream neighbors.

Should we involve NM? Some concern about group becoming too large and unwieldy.

Community needs peace of mind. Despite CDPHE saying things are ok, some people are afraid to let kids or pets play in the Animas.

Need accurate information that the public can easily understand.

Short term vs. long term issues

Crisis event management vs. management of long-term risks. 2 different issues.

The community needs to find its voice.

Need more horsepower from federal government to address abandoned mine issues.

The group needs some concrete, measurable goals

There should be an "asset inventory" to see what knowledge, data, funding, etc. is brought by each of the respective groups

The power of a collective is likely greater than the individual groups on their own.

There was an acknowledgment that many groups have been working on mine reclamation and river quality and had been successful. However, many felt that the GKM spill is the catalyst to bring the interested groups all together to have a greater positive impact for the overall health of the Animas River.

Next Steps:

- The group felt that there is sufficient interest that we should move forward.
- The group felt that it should move forward as a new, independent group.
- Senator Roberts agreed to convene the next meeting but explained that due to her current commitments, she would not like to see someone from the group take a lead role. She will remain involved since this is very important to her.
- Senator Roberts has secured short-term funding for an Executive Director for this group from Colorado's Department of Natural Resources.
- Who should be Executive Director? Each entity or person likely has some "baggage" based on what they have done in the past. It is important that the Executive Director be someone that has a high level of respect within all the communities and be viewed as credible.

- Since GKM is an EPA issue, they will determine the timeline for some things. The group can focus on things within our ability to control. A first project might be to develop information for the public to help restore their confidence in the Animas River

Information about the next meeting will be forthcoming.